

Story of my grandparents

After working in prewar Japan with the skill of "Japanese-English simultaneous interpreter and typist," grandmother Matsuno got married to my grandfather from Iwakuni. She gave birth to three children, including my mother. During the World War II she stayed in Japan, leaving her brother, friends and relatives in Hawai'i. She kept raising children in Tokyo after the war, and even after her husband (my grandfather) passed away, she never returning to the United States and buried her bones in Japan. A woman, who lived through the Meiji, Taisho, Showa, and Heisei eras.



Grandmother Matsuno before marriage



In Hawai'i with a friend

Here are four pictures. The top two photos are of her youth, photos of a modern girl, before she got married. Grandmother's parents immigrated from Hakata, in a search for a new place to start their lives, and found themselves in Hilo on the Big Island of Hawai'i, where they ran a Japanese sweets shop. Grandmother Matsuno was the signboard girl there, but by the time she graduated from high school, her father's health got worse, and they had to return to Hakata with her.

The two pictures below are taken at the post-war residence, a house in Shibuya. Apart from the main building of the wooden Japanese-style house, there was a Western-style house, where grandmother Matsuno, together with her mother, lived at first. My parents built a two-story house on the premises and spent time with their grandparents in their later years. I was in middle school and college at the time. When I was visiting from her neighboring house, she would teach me how to bake pancakes, how to make colorful jelly, and helped me with my English homework.



Grandmother Matsuno and her mother Rie (Shibuya)



Grandmother Matsuno wearing kimono

In Japan at the time when arranged marriages were the norm, my grandfather, a lawyer and entrepreneur, married my Japanese-American grandmother because of love. Life was reasonably good, and the road leading to the main entrance, which invited guests, had perfect paving stones, always well-maintained plants, and the lawn was carefully mowed. There was a helper who lived in the house, and Matsuno wasn't taking care of her three children all alone. I think my grandmother was very treasured as a wife, but during the war, she became enemies with her parents' family: after the war,

she did not work on the front lines like in the past, she did not visit her hometown in Hawai'i. She wore a kimono, and was living her life "like a Japanese housewife." Now I am thinking that her hardships were not beyond my imagination.

And maybe the scars she picked somewhere along the way may have affected my mother, who became an alcoholic, and me, who couldn't have neither family nor children. The compromise I have to make is an extremely personal one, but I think that without it, my grandmother, my mother, and I, none of us may be able to escape from this layer of our memory.

I recently feel that I started doing art because I wanted to let go of all my memories as a set of beautiful things before I die. With that in mind, I visited a city where my grandmother, grandfather, my young mother and I might have passed each other, and while walking around, I picked up pebbles on the roadside, put Japanese paper on the bark of the tree, and used charcoal to do the tree rubbings.



Tree rubbing near coast Ashiya in Kobe where my grandmother gave birth to my mother



Tree rubbings from the area near the Kintai Bridge, the painting of it was displaying at my grandfather's house and pebbles from the schoolyard of the former Iwakuni Junior High School in Yamaguchi.



Near Sumiyoshi Shrine near my grandmother's parents' house and the temple where the grave was (Fukuoka)